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SUBJECT Report on the Ayatollah Khomeini

JACK ANDERSON: Well, the Ayatollah Khomeini still heads the turbulent government in Iran. But a CIA report claims he's on his deathbed. The secret report has been submitted to the National Security Council. It has this to say about Khomeini. I'm quoting. "The Agency doesn't know how he survives."

And I should point out this isn't the first time the CIA has predicted the Ayatollah's imminent death. Three similar reports have been received in the past 18 months.

Now, Khomeini is aware of the speculation about his infirmity. His office just announced that Khomeini will hold a public audience in a few days to squelch the rumors. Well, the dour old ruler may appear in public as promised. He's demonstrated a stubborn resistance to death. But my CIA sources insist he is in fragile health. His arteries are weak, which has caused poor blood circulation.

But what will happen when Khomeini does die? In Iran Khomeini is larger than life. He dominates Iran the way Josef Stalin dominated the Soviet Union. Khomeini's death, therefore, would add to the chaos in Iran.

His heir apparent is another ayatollah, Hussein Ali Montezolli (?). Now, this man has been groomed by Khomeini to be his successor. But once Khomeini is dead, there's no guaranty his anointed heir will actually take over. Other ambitious Moslem leaders are eager to step in Khomeini's shoes.

Now, the Iranian army was decentralized to reduce its political power. But it's strengthened by the war against Iraq. So the army might step in.

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Former President Bani-Sadr is also waiting in the wings in France, just as Khomeini did during the late Shah's rule.

The most ominous possibility is that the leftists, with Soviet backing, might take advantage of the chaos to stage their own coup.